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ABSTRACT

To determine whether the molestation experiences of boys and girls differ, this study analyzed data from 365 adults (40 male and 325 female) molested as children, and compared findings for males and females on the identity of the perpetrator, age at onset and end of molestation, duration of molestation, type of sexual acts, and whether the molestation was reported to law enforcement. The data were collected at an intake interview administered at the time the adults molested as children entered out-patient treatment. Results of the study indicated that boys and girls were equally likely to be molested by natural fathers. Girls were more likely than boys to be molested by stepfathers; boys were more likely to be molested by friends of the family. Molestation started at the same age for both boys and girls, but lasted longer and ended at a later age for girls. Males and females were equally likely to experience fondling from the waist down and oral intercourse, but there were significant differences for incidence of anal intercourse (more common among boys) and fondling from the waist up (more common among girls). (BHK)

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A Comparison of the Abuse Experiences of Male and Female Adults Molested as Children

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Running Head: MALE/FEMALE DIFFERENCES

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Abstract

Do the molestation experiences of boys and girls differ? The present study analyzed data from 365 adults molested as children, and compared findings for males and females on the identity of the perpetrator, age at onset and end of molestation, duration of molestation, type of sexual acts, and whether the molestation was reported to law enforcement. The results indicated that boys and girls were equally likely to be molested by natural fathers, girls were more likely to be molested by stepfathers, and boys were more likely to be molested by friends of the family. Molestation started at the same age for boys and girls, but lasted longer and ended at a later age for girls. Males and females were equally likely to experience fondling from the waist down and oral intercourse, but there were significant differences for incidence of anal intercourse and fondling from the waist up. We discuss our findings in the context of past studies.

A Comparison of the Abuse Experiences of Male and Female Adults Molested as Children

Do the molestation experiences of boys and girls differ? Some recent studies (e.g., White, Halpin, Strom, & Santilli, 1988) have demonstrated that boys and girls respond to sexual abuse differently by showing different patterns of symptoms. But are their molestations qualitatively different? This question is relevant for our understanding of the etiology of abuse, and for our planning of prevention and intervention strategies. The present study addresses the issue of male/female differences in molestation experiences, and examines the following factors: identity of the perpetrator, age at onset and end of molestation, type of sexual acts, and reports to law enforcement. Past studies have indicated differing results for each of these factors.

Controversy over identity of the perpetrator has focused on whether fathers, stepfathers, or friends of the family are more likely to molest boys or girls, or whether boys and girls are equally likely to be molested by all perpetrators (Phelan, 1986; Pierce & Pierce, 1985; Russell, 1984; Spencer & Dunklee, 1986). The present study examines molestation by these three types of perpetrators.

Past studies have also examined whether the molestations of boys or of girls begin at an earlier age. Some studies report boys are molested at a younger age (e.g., Pierce & Pierce, 1985), while other report that girls are (e.g., Finkelhor, 1984). Past studies seem to agree that the molestation of boys is of shorter

duration and ends at an earlier age than that of girls, however (DeJong, Emmett, & Hervada, 1982a; Ellerstein & Canavan, 1980). The present study examines these three issues.

With regard to type of molestation, some studies have reported that oral intercourse and fondling from the waist down are more common for boys (Pierce & Pierce, 1985), while others have found these activities to be common for both boys and girls (Kendall-Tackett & Simon, 1988). Acts such as anal intercourse have been cited as common for boys (DeJong, et al., 1982b), while girls molested by men are more likely to experience vaginal intercourse than are boys molested by women (Pierce & Pierce, 1985). Even though type of abuse has been examined in several studies, no clear pattern of male/female differences have emerged.

Finally, one study (Finkelhor, 1979) found that girls were more likely to report their molestations to law enforcement than were boys. On the other hand, rates of reporting tend to be low for both boys and girls (Kendall-Tackett & Simon, 1987). The present study examines whether males or females were more likely to have reported their molestation experiences to law enforcement. (Finkelhor, 1979). Each of these factors is examined separately in the present study.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 365 adults molested as children: 89% female and 11% male. This number of males, and proportion of males to females, is comparable to past studies (Pierce & Pierce, 1985; Spencer & Dunklee, 1986). The mean age was 30 years; the

range was 18-59 years. Data on the type of sexual acts were available from 278 of the 365 subjects (19% males, 81% females).

Sixteen years was the median between the end of the molestation and first seeking treatment with child sexual abuse as the presenting problem. The mean was 17 years; the range was 0-49 years. The majority of the subjects were self-referred to the Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Program (CSATP). Others were referred by a friend, or were referred by another agency. They were interviewed before beginning treatment.

Procedure

The data were collected at an intake interview administered at the time the adults molested as children entered out-patient treatment at the CSTAP in San Jose, CA. Subjects were interviewed from January 1984 to March 1985, and most were self-referred. Intake interviews for all adults molested as children were included in the present sample. In most cases, a staff member or intern conducted this initial interview by telephone, using a standardized form. All interviewers had received extensive training in the treatment of child sexual abuse, and most were interning for their marriage, family, and child counselor licenses.

Results and Discussion

Data were analyzed using t-tests, chi-square analysis, and Fisher's Exact Test of Probability (when cell sizes were five or less). Data were analyzed based on number in each cell, but are reported in percentages to simplify comparison of findings. All analysis, except for type of sexual acts, were conducted on the

sample of 365 (40 males, 325 females). Data on types of sexual acts were avaiable for 278 subjects (23 males and 255 females).

There were significant male/female differences when comparing identity of the perpetrator. Natural fathers molested males and females about equally (33% of males; 39% of females); stepfathers molested significantly more females (8% of males; 22% of females); and friends of the family molested significantly more males (38% of males; 10% of females) (X^2 =23.32, $p<.001$). These findings on stepfathers and friends of the family are consistent with past findings (Phelan, 1986; Russell, 1984). Natural fathers molested a greater percentage of males than past studies indicated (Khan & Sexton, 1983; Spencer & Dunklee, 1986), perhaps because the presence of fathers in the home was not controlled for. The issue of natural fathers in the home should be addressed in future studies. The higher percentage of natural fathers might also be related to the present study using a clinical sample. Molestation by a natural father can contribute to a more severe molestation experience, possibly causing victims of both sexes to seek treatment (McLeer, Atkins, Foa, & Ralphe, 1988).

There was no significant difference in the age of onset of molestation for males and females, $t(51)=.081$. In fact, the average age of onset was almost identical: 7.65 years for males, and 7.6 years for females. One possible explanation for this similarity may have been of the physical resemblance between boys and girls before the development of secondary sex characteristics. Some perpetrators may have been attracted to the relative androgyny of young children--seeing their

childishness, rather than their gender, as attractive. The results of the present study suggest that young children of both genders are at equal risk for molestation.

Although there was no sex difference for age of onset, there were significant differences between males and females both for age at the end of molestation and for duration of molestation. The average age for males at the end of the molestation was 11.55, while the average age for females was 13.20, $t(47)=2.15$, $p<.036$.

Related to a victim's age at the end of molestation is the average duration of molestation in years. For the present study, it was 3.91 years for males, and 5.6 years for females, $t(47)=2.18$, $p<.04$. There are several possible explanations for this finding. Molestation may have ended sooner for boys because the perpetrators were likely to be from outside the family and did not have continuous access to the child. There might have been a greater amount of physical trauma for male victims, because of either force or type of sexual acts, which required medical intervention. Or male victims may have been strong enough to ward off future advances, thus ending the molestation at an earlier age. Possibly, a combination of all of these factors caused the difference between duration of molestation for boys and girls.

In the present study, there was no significant difference between males and females in their rates of reporting (17.8% of females; 17.5% of males). The high percentage of extrafamilial molestations of males may have contributed to a higher reporting

rate for males than we would have found if the present study had looked at reporting rate only for victims of intrafamilial molestation. Another possible explanation is that perpetrators who molest males (whether or not they are inside the family) might be considered more deviant than those who molest females. Because of this, families of male victims may have encouraged reporting (Pierce & Pierce, 1985).

Consistent with past studies, the molestations of females included significantly more fondling from the waist up (8% of males; 54% of females; Fisher's, $p<.001$). The molestations of males included significantly more anal intercourse (30% of males; 7% of females; Fisher's, $p<.001$). Contrary to some past studies (e.g., Pierce & Pierce, 1985), there was no significant difference between males and females in the number of cases that included fondling from the waist down (91% of males; 92% of females) or oral intercourse (52% of males; 48% of females). Oral intercourse and fondling from the waist down appeared to be common occurrences for all victims. The findings on type of sexual act should be interpreted with caution, however, since the sample of males was small. Future studies, with larger samples of males, should examine this issue.

In conclusion, the results of the present study indicated that natural fathers molested boys and girls in about equal numbers. Stepfathers were more likely to molest girls; friends of the family were most likely to molest boys. Molestation started at about the same age for both boys and girls, but lasted longer and ended at an older age for girls. There was no male/female difference in incidence of of oral intercourse and

fondling from the waist down, but there were significant differences for fondling from the waist up and anal intercourse. There were no significant differences between boys and girls in their rates of reporting their molestations to law enforcement.

Based on the results of the present study, the differences between males and females that are most striking are in the identity of the perpetrator, age at the end of molestation, and duration of molestation. Future prevention programs should certainly incorporate information from this and similar studies about where boys and girls are most at risk. Similarly, we need to understand more fully why boys seem to be successful at stopping molestation earlier than girls. This information can also be useful for prevention education, teaching both boys and girls to protect themselves. Finally, these findings have implications for understanding differences between the response of boys and girls to molestation. Perhaps they respond differently because they are, in fact, responding to very different experiences. Our future research on the effects of sexual abuse needs to separate the responses of male and female victims, and incorporate information on the type of molestations they have experienced, which could account for the differences between them.

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